

Ambiguous Being, who is afraid of Identity

Group Exhibition – Artists from Tawan, Germany and Israel

Kav 16- Community Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, IL

2012

In an era of globalization, elimination of borders and unlimited access to sources of information it is customary to think of the cultural and mental distance as diminishing to the point of rendering the world into one "global village". Nevertheless, even today man's identity is still shaped by his geographic origins and depends on the historical, cultural and social context. The definition of the self as a distinct individual is a result of one's identification with his immediate and close surroundings while instilling meaning in his affiliation and belonging to different groups. At the same time, the individual's self definition is also constantly formulated – perhaps until the end of his life - in relation to the other.

Israel 2012 offers a society which is more layered, complex and charged than ever before. After sixty-four years of existence, the young state seems to be given to imminent danger of collapse under the strain of economic, internal and external political problems, and reveals a split and divided society. Surrounded by this cultural, national and ethnic diversity infused with conflicts and crises, the individual is forced to examine each time anew his social affiliation and self definition in relation to the collective.

The collection of video works featured in the exhibition places a mirror in front of the complex Israeli reality and attempts to supply a glimpse into the experience of Israeli society, a jigsaw puzzle of sorts composed of fragments of different identities. The works oscillate between the concrete and the metaphoric dimension, while all share an underlying interest in the question of man's identity as an individual forming in relation to the collective through a prism of national, political and ethnic identity.

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and occupation policy that weigh on the existence of Israel as a democratic pluralistic state are a central theme linking several of the works. The works Houria (2010), The Messenger, 2011, H2, 2010, The First House, 2009, Through Walls, 2008 and Hebron Road Under the Bridge, 2010, adopt different perspectives to a reflective and critical examination of the place of the "other" (Palestinian/Israeli-Arab) under the rule

of a collective. Nurit Sharett's work H2 presents a touching human document recounting the story of the residents of occupied Hebron through the artist's encounter with her video-art class students and their families. Other works offer an autobiographic aspect, like the work of Rafat Hattab, Houria. It is a semi-documentary work that portrays the yearning of the Palestinian people for a homeland through the story of Hattab's family which was displaced in 1948 from its home village and consequently scattered between different countries throughout the world. Another cluster of works reveals the operative mechanism of IDF in operational military activity. So, for instance, Avi Dabach's work Through Walls reveals how IDF soldiers move from one house to another by breaking through the houses' walls, in order to eliminate any potential danger to the soldiers' lives in the course of operational activity in a refugee camp. These works reflect on questions of ethics and moral and expose the injustice and ugliness inherent to mechanisms of oppression.

The works Shabbat, 2008, Gefilte Fish, 2005, Mordechai and Me, 2010 and Compressed Ceramic Powder, 2007, address the means and consequences of the construction of Israel's national identity. The state, which was established as a home for the Jewish people, has linked its national identity with its religious-Jewish identity from its inception and employed Jewish-religious myths that underwent secularization process as a means for constructing a national identity. Mordechai and Me by Tamar Nissim and Compressed Ceramic Powder by Amir Yatziv are two works that take on the myth of heroism that served as a platform for the sacrifice of man for the homeland, expressed in the adage "it is good to die for our country". Nira Pereg's work Shabbat and Gefilte Fish by Boaz Arad display a heterogeneous social fabric and deal with issues of ethnicity and religious intolerance, a result of an immigration policy and lack of separation between religion and state.

The works Moal Yad (Roman Salute), 2009, and Change the World, 2011, simulate a sociological experiment taking place in the streets of the city of Tel Aviv, employing a "manipulation" prespecified by the artists. The aim of the experiments is to study the consciousness and mind-frame of contemporary Israeli society. Moal Yad by Hadas Tapuchi examines the reaction of casual viewers when confronted with the image of a fascist icon – a man dressed in a European military uniform raising his hand in a Nazi salute while reciting the

Israeli national anthem "HaTikva" in German, thus exposing the ignorance of passersby. Itamar Rose's work Change the World explores the dynamics and politics of the social protest phenomenon by erecting a booth for "changing the world" and inviting the public to speak their mind and "fight" for their beliefs.

The gamut that comprises the collective is addressed in works that offer a reflective examination of the identity of the individual. The works My Ghetto, 2010, Poetry that is Meant to Kill, 2010, and Twins, 2010, adopt a metaphorical outlook on the experience and complexity of the individual in relation to the definition of its identity. Poetry that is Meant to Kill by Nadav Bin-Nun depicts an oedipal relationship, in which the son commits a metaphoric patricide and adopts the father's identity. The work's narrative is unraveled through symbolic actions like writing words on the son's forehead. Alongside these, the works Making, 2011, and It's in Your Hands, 2006, expand the discourse in which the "self" is concretized as the figure of the artist, raising questions concerning the artist's experience, existence and place in society. In Matan Daube's work It's in Your Hands, the issue of the artist's future is manifested through an encounter with a man who presumes to "read" his future by looking at his palms, providing a promise for a good future to come.

Ambiguous Being—Who is Afraid of Identity? a collaborative project of three independent curators from Berlin, Taipei and Tel Aviv, provides a unique opportunity for a comparative examination of the complex and conflictual existence of the individual in relation to the collective from the different perspectives of three major international cities through the critical eyes of the artists in the show. The video works featured in the exhibition are a kind of a local seismograph, which responds to national, political, social and multicultural shifts germane to the existential daily reality of each country.